

The AMAZING ADVENTURE of CHARLES CAPTAIN

By MAY EDGINTON

X--THE FUR COAT

THE Duchess of Porton walked down Piccadilly in her fourteen-hundred guinea ermine coat, and met, among other pedestrians, an imperious young woman and a tall, fair young man of whose identity, in common with that of the other pedestrians, the Duchess of Porton was splendidly unaware.

The imperious-looking person turned suddenly from her companion and exclaimed "Milly!" in a voice loud enough to arrest the duchess' attention and the duchess' progress. Turning, she beheld the young woman—who combined with her imperial air and proud aloofness a wonderful and exclusive simplicity of toilet—gazing at her eagerly. By the side of this beautiful person stood her young cavalier, obviously unprepared for events.

Millicent, duchess of Porton, raised her glasses and stared through them.

"I beg your pardon, your grace," said the beautiful young woman, shrinking a little with a kind of proud modesty at the duchess' stare, "but I knew you at once, and I am afraid we all think of you as Milly still, though the happy days at Lufton were over long ago."

"Happy days," said the duchess, still peering curiously, "at Lufton! I am afraid—"

"I am Rosy Phillips," replied the imperial girl, and after a pause added with perfect dignity, "I expect you have forgotten us all."

"Forgotten you all!" the duchess cried. "Certainly not. But—let me see—you were the smallest. I remember Mary best. And how is Mary?"

"She is married, your grace—"

"Dear me," said the duchess, "that is awfully interesting. You must come and see me and tell me all about your family. Tomorrow afternoon at 3. How nice! Our house is in Hapley Square, as you probably know. And have you all come back to England?"

"Only me," said the lovely person, adding as an afterthought, with a glance at her escort, "and, as your grace sees, Bob."

"Really, really," said the duchess amiably, "and this is Bob? How grown! Let me see. Bob was—"

"The fifth, your grace," replied the young woman.

"So he was!" cried the duchess, who had obviously forgotten the fact. "How charming! The fifth!"

She kindly shook hands with him.

The young man and the young woman continued their way, which was toward Emperor's Gate.

"Who is the lady?" said he.

"The Duchess of Porton, my dear Charles," answered she.

"And who are you, Anna?" asked Mr. Charles Captain.

"You heard perfectly well, my dear good Charles!" replied Miss Anna Stuart reproachfully. "I am Rosy Phillips."

"And who am I?"

"My brother Bob."

"Indeed," said Mr. Captain.

"I will ask you to tea," said Anna Stuart kindly, "and explain matters to you."

Charles hailed a taxicab, and to hasten the explanation drove Anna home to her Emperor's Gate flat. She sat by him, looking extremely remote, pensive, fidgety, and chic, swathed in a wonderful costume of white cloth with a great stole and muff of incongruous white chiffon and fox fur, and all that she said to Charles during the drive was:

"Directly I saw the duchess it occurred to me that she had a beautiful fur coat."

This being indisputable, Mr. Captain answered nothing, but he became very thoughtful.

They went into Anna Stuart's little green sitting-room, where by the fire tea awaited them in china whose color formed the happiest combination with the colors of the soft silk hangings. Looking particularly charming, soft, and feminine, Anna poured out tea.

She also indicated the latest number of that popular weekly, Society Murrings.

Opening this, Mr. Captain found that the Duchess of Porton would shortly have a birthday, being now in her thirty-fourth year. "Beautiful and talented," murmured the weekly, "she is the daughter of that wealthy American, Mr. J. B. Lufton, who bought Lufton, in Derbyshire, twenty years ago."

"She was indeed a sunbeam," said one ancient cottager to our representative who had called upon her, and though she was so rich she was not proud. Indeed, the extreme simplicity which marked the duchess' childhood cannot be better illustrated than by the fact that her dearest playmates during her happy youth at Lufton were the

children of her father's land-steward, Mr. Ebenezer Phillips. "And a fine, healthy lot they were," said the same chatty old lady to our representative; "there was Mary the eldest, William, etc., etc., etc., etc.; Bob, a handsome lad, and Rosy, the youngest. Mr. Phillips went with his family to Australia, however, before Miss Lufton grew up, and we have not heard of them since."

"I am, then, Bob," said Mr. Captain, when he had read this.

"A handsome lad," Anna supplemented.

Charles blushed deeply. Anna continued:

"I am always very thankful that I have an agile mind. Directly I saw the Duchess of Porton this afternoon I remembered the whole of that paragraph like a flash. I became, instantly, Rosy the youngest. It seemed obvious that Rosy, coming last of a long line and therefore so very juvenile, could not be remembered vividly by old playmates."

Charles assented gravely.

"I do not like your tone, Charles," said Anna Stuart.

"I am sorry for that," said Charles, looking moodily at his extremely nice boots, "but my tone, at least, is my own."

"And no one is likely to imitate it either. Lucky you!" said Anna, putting her feet on the fender, "and lucky them!"

With this obscure exclamation—patently intended, however, for rudeness—the beautiful young woman lapsed into a silence, provoking as some feminine silences can be.

"What is our program?" asked Mr. Captain presently.

The young man now spoke again with all due deference to her wishes, for he could not bear this particular silence of Anna Stuart's.

She said frigidly: "You heard the appointment made? Three o'clock tomorrow at Hapley Square."

"Am I coming?" the poor slave asked.

"No," said she, "I think I shall go alone tomorrow. I shall not need Bob."

Then she began very slowly and deliberately to laugh, and her cheeks leaped to her eyes, and her dimples played in her cheeks.

"I really cannot think," said Mr. Captain, looking longingly at the charming scheme of decoration Anna made in a white Paris frock, with the expression of a mischievous child in a green chair, "why you and I don't give up this reprehensible life of ours—"

"Because," replied she, "it pays us to continue."

"Give it up," pursued the young man, drawing a little nearer, "get married; settle down; and be good."

"Also," Anna continued, without listening, "we have, partner, acquired the acquisitive habit, which is hard to shake off. Also, it saves us from boredom."

Asking at the Hapley Square house the next afternoon for the duchess, Miss Anna Stuart was taken up to her grace's private sitting room at the back of the house, an apartment communicating with her grace's bed, dressing, and bath rooms, the windows of which apartments all overlooked immediately a meadow, though beyond this there was a great view of the city which the duchess said to her visitor at once that she passionately admired. Drawing Miss Stuart hospitably to a comfortable chair, she also looked her over thoroughly, and after asking very kindly after father, mother, Mary, and the rest of the family, not excluding the prospects of Bob, she said:

"You are very smart, my dear, good girl, extremely so. There is a sort of air—"

"If it was not so palpably absurd in your station of life, I should say that Paquin dressed you."

"Your grace," replied the modest and charming girl, "is very kind. I have been learning the dressmaking on the continent for two years, and I make most of my own things. Mother thought I should find a good opening in London, after my experience."

"And have you?" said the duchess, thrusting her head forward in an inquiring way she had.

The young woman sighed, cuddled her hands in her incongruous muff of white chiffon and fox fur; opened her wide eyes wider.

"I have found nothing, your grace. These London shops don't seem to have a position I should care to take. I shall try to wait till some suitable vacancy occurs."

Here the duchess displayed great kindness, sitting beside her former baby playmate, patting her hand, and running a piercing eye over her Parisian ligne.

"Help," said her grace, "help, my poor, good girl, is what you need, and help is

what I am only too delighted to give you. I am glad that you have such grateful recollections of your life at Lufton. My father thought a great deal of your parents and was very kind to them." The duchess paused to repeat "very kind, indeed, to them," continuing, "Well, my maid is leaving me next week, and I am quite willing to take you in her place for a few months, considering that, to make up for your lack of experience in such a position, you will, of course, be able to make a great many of my frocks. The salary is 35 pounds a year. You will see that is immensely to your benefit. If you make my clothes well my friends would ask 'Who did it?' and I should tell them. One really can hardly say to what such a magnificent opening might lead."

Thanking the duchess for her great kindness, the young woman said that though for her part she had no hesitation over the offer, she yet would like to consult Bob before accepting it, as he was her sole protection in England. The visitor now expressed admiration of the ermine coat.

"Ah! said the duchess, 'my coat?' and a shadow fell upon her.

It was due entirely to diplomacy acted by a desire to pin down this shadow

"We certainly have made money, partner," said she pensively.

A note in her voice brought Mr. Captain closer to look at her. Silver tears trembled on Anna's lashes.

"Lady!" cried he, immensely concerned.

"Charles," said Anna, turning to him with tragedy, "does it occur to you what it means to a woman to part with her one—or, anyway, her best—fur coat?"

"It does," said Mr. Captain, with a ray of hope. "I think it a most pitiful and horrible calamity. You are going to allow the Duchess of Porton to keep her fur coat?"

"Not only will I allow her to keep it," replied Anna, winking away two kind tears that misted her brown eyes, "but I shall make it my business to see that she does keep it. Or rather, you will make it your business."

"Dear me!" said Charles. "I come into it? I am, as I think I have told you before, lady, getting rather tired of civil robberies."

Anna said in her most imperious manner: "Well, after I have declined Milly's offer tomorrow afternoon, I wash my hands of the affair. It is up to you to get the mortgage thing, the deed, the plan, or whatever it is technically called, from Mr. Lew Cadella, the money lender. It is time that we did a really disinterested good action, or we shall forget what integrity feels like."

"It will be rather fine," Mr. Captain murmured, "to undertake it just for sheer sport and to help the Duchess of Porton."

speaking as Wilfred & Barter. Memorizing this detail, the young man returned to his cab, and drove to the office of Mr. Lew Cadella, in Ludgate Circus.

He learned that Mr. Lew Cadella had gone.

Booking an appointment as a representative of Messrs. Bennett & Norfolk, solicitors, Queen Victoria street, for the following morning, Charles Captain returned to his rooms, dined excellently and occupied himself during the evening with assimilating details of Mr. J. B. Lufton mentioned in "Who's Who," also in certain sporting and financial annals. He then prepared with some care a strictly legal-looking document. After this he sat down to write his nightly letter to the heartless lady of Emperor's Gate, and to say:

"My dearest dearest.

(You cannot stop me writing that, and I know that you will read it, although you will not let me say it). It is going to be a very long time till the day after tomorrow when I suppose that I shall be graciously permitted to see your ladyship again. Keep your little adorable hands out of all risks and let your very willing servant take them all upon himself.

"Anna, I love you. Will you marry me? Good night, my darling—good night."

The young man rose the next morning with the exhilarating sense of impending action that always spiced his adventures. Irreproachable in black coat, gray trousers, and silk hat, he went at 9:30 to the office of Mr. Lew Cadella.

Mr. Cadella, glancing at the card lying upon his desk, received him courteously, saying, "From Bennett & Norfolk! Ah! yes. . . . Yes! . . . I have the pleasure of a slight acquaintance with Mr. Norfolk, but not with the senior partner."



Sitting in her green chair with her feet upon the fender.

and discover its substance, that the visitor stayed to tea with the duchess. Much conversation passed and diplomacy extracted this:

"That coat, my dear good girl, quite between ourselves, is mortgaged."

"Mortgaged, your grace?"

"I take that to be the word. Your class, I believe, would call it 'pledged,' to a money lender, a shark called Lew Cadella."

"But your grace has the use of the coat?"

"Certainly," said the duchess, "it is in my wardrobe. I have, however, to pay the money within a fortnight. What my husband will say when the coat disappears I do not know."

Sitting in her green chair, with her feet upon the fender and her hands cuddled in her muff, Anna detailed to Mr. Captain the duchess' offer.

"Well," said the young man, sleeping down the back of his fair head with a slow hand, "I suppose you now see your way paved for another risky job. And you could buy six such coats for yourself!"

"She has a birthday soon," said Miss Stuart, looking as kind as an angel. "I am glad that all this has happened just now. It will be like giving a very handsome birthday gift, and you and I, Charles, my dear, are not in the habit of giving handsome gifts."

The young man, very lightly hearted, left her soon after tea was over. He said to himself as he walked to his Piccadilly chambers overlooking the Green Park, "When one is a rogue by habit, how delightful to be a philanthropist by accident!"

In the happiest humors he surveyed his immediate plan of campaign.

It was only 5:30. He dropped into a stationer's, gave an order, and emerged to engage a taxicab. At his rooms he sorted an extensive stock of visiting and professional cards, and chose one engraved with the name of a respectable firm of solicitors in the city, whom he may call, for the purpose of this story, Messrs. Menett & Norfolk. Well supplied with reference books as he was, Mr. Captain also looked up in a directory the name of a certain Derby firm of solicitors, of whom we shall here

perceiving in a moment the part for which he could cast himself, the young man replied:

"I am Mr. Bennett's son." "Yes. . . . yes. . . . yes! I presume."

The young man assented and proceeded, with an admirable manner, to unfold his business.

"We have been instructed by Wilfred & Barter, of Derby, on behalf of their client, Mr. Lufton, of Lufton—"

"Wilfred & Barter. Yes. . . . yes. . . . yes!" Mr. Cadella murmured. "A very sound provincial firm, I think, very sound indeed."

"Their client," said the caller, "be lieved that his daughter, the Duchess of Porton, has mortgaged—as I think we must call it—a certain ermine coat to you. This is correct?"

"Mr. Lufton has not approached his daughter about it, and does not wish to do so; but he hopes that, she will be aided with his private assistance, to keep the little matter from the duke. Mr. Lufton, on account of his daughter's lack of business knowledge, wishes to have legal assurance that the matter really stands as he has been informed, and to know how her grace has bound herself. I am instructed to ask you to be so good as to show me the existing agreement between yourself and her grace."

"With what intention?" the money-lender inquired.

"Mr. Lufton would, on receiving our report that the arrangement is all in order, settle the matter with you at once."

"I hardly see," replied Mr. Cadella, "that I am under a necessity to show

you this agreement on Mr. Lufton's behalf."

"A mere matter of form," said the pseudo lawyer. "We rely upon your business courtesy and upon your willingness to give Mr. Lufton every facility to assist his daughter privately."

"If Lufton means to settle the affair," said Mr. Cadella, after hesitation, "there is, of course, no reason why I should not oblige you." He touched a bell.

"The Porton mortgage," he said to the clerk who came.

The clerk went and returned with a long envelope which he handed to his employer. The money lender drew out a business-like document, laid the envelope upon his desk, and handed the document to his visitor, saying:

"There you are. And you will see that it is in order. That is the duchess' signature."

The young man looked minutely through the few details of the document.

"My terms to the duchess were unusually easy," said Mr. Cadella. "Have a cigar?"

The visitor, with a murmured word of thanks, stretched out a hand to take one, his eyes still upon the document he held. His eyes being thus occupied and his movement, in his abstraction, being somewhat sudden and jerky, his hand came in sharp contact with the cigar case, which fell to the ground.

"Beg pardon!" cried the representative of Bennett & Norfolk.

"Don't mention it," said Mr. Cadella, stooping for his case—sitting, for he was fat and stiff though but middle-aged.

When he stood erect again, rather red from the effort, the young man was folding the mortgage precisely. He took the envelope from the desk, in spite of Mr. Cadella's affable, "Now! now! now! don't you trouble!" and shot the parchment within.

"It is, of course," said he, "perfectly in order, and I must say I consider your terms to her grace extremely courteous."

He now took a cigar. "Thanks very much indeed," he lighted it. "Wilfred & Barter will hear from us tomorrow morning, and I think you will hear from them very shortly. Between you and me I fancy old Lufton rather imagined his daughter had fallen to the sharks."

"They both laugh," said Mr. Cadella, the young man like a real good fellow. The money lender struck his bell again and the same clerk came in, received the long envelope with its inclosure, and withdrew.

"I am very much obliged to you," said the lawyer, shaking hands warmly.

"No, no, no," said Mr. Cadella. "Don't mention it. Well, if I hear from old Lufton so much the better for her grace. The duke's a very tough nut, they say. I have no doubt there would be a row. Good morning. Very pleased to have met you. I have a slight acquaintance with Norfolk—"

On this note Mr. Cadella saw his caller away.

The young man took a taxicab to the stationer's where he had, the day before, ordered cards to be got ready at express speed. In the cab he drew from his sleeve a legal-looking document—having played the oldest card-sharper trick in the world—unfolded it, and smiled slyly at the signature of the Duchess of Porton footing the mortgage. He put it away in his breast pocket.

When he had obtained the new cards, Mr. Captain drove to Euston.

He was at Lufton rather late in the afternoon.

"I want to see Mr. Lufton on very important business," he said to the butler, and handed to him a card inscribed:

Mr. Lew Cadella, 107 Ludgate Circus, E. C.

"Are you Lew Cadella himself?" asked J. B. Lufton as he entered the library, where the caller had been taken.

Thus shown that the duchess' father did not personally know Mr. Lew Cadella, Charles cast himself instantly for the part.

He rose and bowed.

"I am, sir," he said ceremoniously, but with a brisk manner and a great air of commercial ability. "And I have come from town to see you on a matter which concerns your daughter."

"Which concerns the Duchess of Porton?" her father asked.

"Ah! said Mr. Cadella, "I have come to see you on a matter which concerns your daughter."

"Just so," replied Charles Captain, and drew from his breast pocket the deed of mortgage on the ermine coat and laid it before the old gentleman.

When J. B. Lufton had examined it in silence and looked up sternly in silence Charles continued with an impassively very telling in its dry directness:

"The duchess, as you see, has three more weeks in which to pay off the mortgage. My terms to her, I think you will in justice allow, sir, are unusually easy. I need not repeat them, they are set out there. I anticipated the fur coat falling into my possession at the end of that time, for I know the duchess to be extremely restricted—and really, my dear sir, I don't want the coat. Such a small matter is hardly worth arranging to a man in my way of business, but I arranged it merely to oblige such a friend as the Duchess of Porton. My visit here today should really prove that I have such an object at heart, for I come to suggest, sir, that I hand over that deed of mortgage to you this afternoon."

"On full payment, of course?" said J. B. Lufton.

"On full payment, of course," said the young man, "naturally that. I have never been obliged to a man financially, and I do not propose to begin, sir. But with such a lady as the Duchess of Porton—"

"Slight sentimentality wavered in his voice. He resumed: 'I decided to come today for a sudden idea put into my head by a society paper, from which I understand that the duchess has a birthday tomorrow.'"

"Charles waited in silence.

Quite suddenly, however, the idea permeated. He understood.

"You mean to suggest that this," he tapped the deed of mortgage, "would make a suitable birthday present for my daughter?"

Perfectly at Charles' "I do, sir," Charles Captain replied.

"Well, well. . . . said the old gentleman, musing.

"I have very little time to spare, sir, before catching my train," said Charles, looking at a very handsome and creditable watch. "I hope that you will make up your mind. I do not know that I should have inconvenienced myself to the extent of this journey for any other client, but the Duchess of Porton is a lady who inspires immense admiration and good feeling, and I have had great pleasure

In coming here to put her difficulty before you."

"I am giving my daughter a hunter for a birthday present," mused the old gentleman.

Charles emitted a harsh and admirable laugh.

"Take me to Newcastle!" exclaimed he, "and deny it broadcast!"

His gesture of almost contempt was dramatic, but not too much so.

J. B. Lufton stood up, put the palms of his hands flat upon the library table, and addressing Charles Captain, told him what he thought of money-lending sharks who cajoled ignorant women into parting with their furs and jewels. The old gentleman's thoughts, as expressed without reservation, were extremely vigorous. When he was exhausted, however, he saw, sadly enough, the inevitable end, and he took out his check book.

Mr. Captain departed shortly afterward, a very well satisfied young man. Traveling swiftly back to Euston, he thought upon Anna Stuart, and his thoughts ran somewhat thus: "I wonder what you are doing now?"

"You are having tea out of the gold and white china, in your sitting-room. . . . your house is in Hapley Square, and you have on a snaky white frock that looks ripping against the green background."

"No woman but you can look pretty eating muffins. The butter is apt to run, but not over your shoulders."

"I wonder if you are thinking of me at all? I believe you do, sometimes."

"My angel. . . ."

"Will you come out to lunch with me tomorrow?"

"I wonder what you are doing now?"

Miss Anna Stuart took tea with the Duchess of Porton, while Charles Captain traveled from Derby to Euston, and this is what she was doing.

She told her grace that yesterday she had consulted Bob. Bob was doubtful. This morning as if confirming Bob's doubts, came a letter from a well-known Paris dressmaking house, offering her a splendid post. Would not her grace congratulate her?

A little seared by the disappointment, her grace said:

"It was after 3 o'clock, and a dark winter afternoon. Tea had been served in the duchess' back upstairs sitting-room, that overlooked the meadow, and which communicated with her bed, dressing, and bath rooms."

Now, when they had finished tea—eating a great deal as most women do at this time when no male is present—and before the duchess had said good-by to Anna—for the while Rosy Phillips—and wished her good luck, a message came from the duke asking his wife to speak to him in his study. The duchess promised her old playmate that she would return shortly and left the room.

Miss Anna Stuart rose, softly opened the adjoining door leading into the dressing-room and peeped through. No male was there. Miss Stuart switched on light and darted in.

The key was in the lock of the huge wardrobe.

The beautiful person, looking as wicked as sin, her devil and her dimples romping together, turned that key and beheld the ermine coat.

She took the coat, rolled it into a bundle, limed outwards, unlocked the wardrobe again and dropped the key into her coat pocket. (It should, of course, have been in the pocket of the duchess' maid, and that is where they afterward looked for it, not believing her protest.) Opening the window, Anna Stuart then looked down into the meadow. All was dark and quiet there save for a light dimly shining in one stable window, across which a shadow now and again moved—a groom cleaning a horse. A loud hissing sound came from him through the stable door which was ajar, and this sound made the young woman, culpable as she was, shake with uncontrollable laughter. She dropped the coat from the window, closed it, and returned to the sitting-room.

Five minutes later the duchess' charming former playmate left the house, her beautiful brown eyes shining with gratitude for the kind parting words of the duchess, and her curiously small, soft, and feminine hands cuddled in her great white muff.

The square was very quiet at that hour, afternoon life having ebbed, and evening life not yet flowing.

Mr. Charles Captain called the following morning about 11 o'clock on Miss Anna Stuart at Emperor's Gate.

He was shown into the green sitting-room, where that splendid young woman, in a white satin blouse and a slim serge skirt, was just placing the lid upon a large cardboard box. A pair of scissors and a furrier's knife lay upon the table.

"Good morning, Charles, my dear," said she with an air of modest elation. "Were you very busy yesterday